

Creating Tiles

Guide to creating tiles in RMVX-Ace style

Part 3: Shapes, Edges & Palettes

Tutorials 1 and 2 covered the theory necessary to creating tiles. Part 3 will also be covering some of the basic theory, but I will now begin to introduce practice. The end of each section will include an exercise that will help reinforce important concepts.

Outline:

3.1 Shapes

- Understanding basic shapes.
- Creating top-down perspective with basic shapes

3.2 Edges

- Anti-aliased edges and transparency
- Straight edges and right-side RTP edge

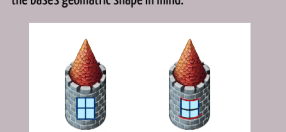
3.3 Palettes

- Understanding Contrast and Saturation
- Creating a palette from RTP

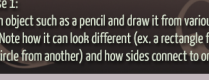
If you've never done any kind of art before, it might be beneficial to look at a few art beginners' tutorials. You will want to look at basic shading tutorials, understanding the color wheel and how light source affects shading.

Part 3.1: Shapes

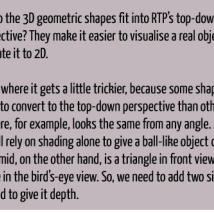
Tiles begin with a simple 3D geometric shape. From there, we use shading and texture to turn it into an object with dimension and depth.



Once you are familiar with the basic geometric objects, you can combine them to create more complex tiles.



When creating composite objects, you will need to keep the base's geometric shape in mind.

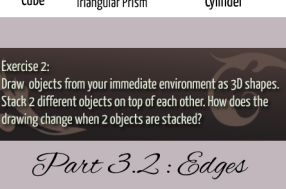


Exercise 1:

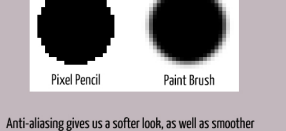
Take an object such as a pencil and draw it from various views or sides. Note how it can look different (ex. a rectangle from one view, but a circle from another) and how sides connect to one another.

How do the 3D geometric shapes fit into RTP's top-down perspective? They make it easier to visualise a real object and translate it to 2D.

This is where it gets a little trickier, because some shapes are easier to convert to the top-down perspective than others. A sphere, for example, looks the same from any angle. As such, you will rely on shading alone to give a ball-like object depth. A pyramid, on the other hand, is a triangle in front view and a square in the bird's-eye view. So, we need to add two sides to the pyramid to give it depth.



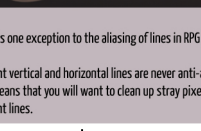
General rule of thumb is if a circle is involved (ex: cone = circle + triangle), you won't need to add any extra sides. If the object is made from straight or diagonal lines, you will need to add extra sides to create dimension.



Exercise 2: Draw objects from your immediate environment as 3D shapes. Stack 2 different objects on top of each other. How does the drawing change when 2 objects are stacked?

Part 3.2: Edges

Traditional pixel art uses a 1px brush to place pixels that make up lines and shapes. Since RTP tiles are made through a process of digital painting, lines created with a brush contain anti-aliasing. Anti-aliasing is using extra pixels of various opacities to soften the line.



Anti-aliasing gives us a softer look, as well as smoother lines.

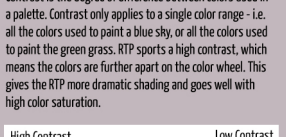
The brush tool in art programs automatically uses anti-alias on the edges. This is why you will want to use a brush for your linework as well as for shading.

One very important thing to keep in mind is that anti-aliasing uses several opacities - meaning, some of the pixels are more transparent than others. If you're using a transparent background, this makes no difference. But if you're using a color background, you will end up with several background colors.

This means that when you import your tiles in RPG Maker, you will end up with fuzzy white pixels around your tile. To avoid this, make sure you're using a transparent background and that you're saving your image as a .PNG.

Exercise 3: Draw shapes and lines with a brush. Zoom in and look at how the lines are anti-aliased. Layer several lines on top of each other. How does the opacity of outer pixel change?

There is one exception to the aliasing of lines in RPG Maker's RTP. Straight vertical and horizontal lines are never anti-aliased. This means that you will want to clean up stray pixels around straight lines.



Straight-lined objects have one more quirk. There is a 1-pixel dark line on the right side of the object's top.



This helps the object pop up from the background.

Exercise 4:

Using a brush, draw straight lines of varying width. How do anti-aliased areas change with line width? Tip: Hold Shift while drawing to draw a straight line in Photoshop.

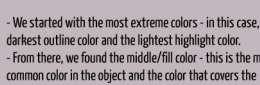
Part 3.3: Palette

RTP colors are rich and vibrant - this is created through a higher saturation and contrast between values.

Saturation is essentially the amount of colorfulness in a color. When an object has a low saturation, the colors are closer to gray. When an object has high saturation, the colors are more vibrant and pure.



Contrast is the degree of difference between colors used in a palette. Contrast only applies to a single color range - i.e. all the colors used to paint a blue sky, or all the colors used to paint the green grass. RTP sports a high contrast, which means the colors are further apart on the color wheel. This gives the RTP more dramatic shading and goes well with high color saturation.



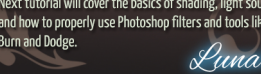
Exercise 5:

Look at screenshots of your favorite games. What kind of saturation is used? Try to find screenshots with different moods/atmosphere. How does contrast help convey a mood?

A premade palette is a very useful tool. It ensures that you will have the right contrast and saturation - something that's a lot trickier to accomplish when you're just pulling colors from the color wheel.

With that in mind, let's create a palette from the RTP.

Photoshop can easily display a palette used in a pixel image through File > Save For Web.



But since RTP tiles are digitally painted, we cannot use this technique.

A palette of 256 colors is not a simple and workable palette. Instead, we will create our own palette.

We have reduced the 256 palette to 6 colors. It may not seem like much, but painting with a brush will create the extra values.

- We started with the most extreme colors - in this case, the darkest outline color and the lightest highlight color.
- From there, we found the middle/fill color - this is the most common color in the object and the color that covers the biggest surface.
- Lastly, we found a shadow color - color that bridges the middle and the outline.

You may have also noticed that the third color from the top has both "highlight" and "shadow" in its title. This means that the color is used as a highlight in the dark area (front of the cabinet) and a shadow in the light area (top of the cabinet).

Exercise 6:

Use different tile pieces from the RTP to create a working palette. Use no less than 3 colors, and no more than 6. Which pieces use the most color? Which pieces use the same palette?

Sites to visit:

- <http://www.shmoop.com/basic-geometry/three-d-prisms-cylinders-cones-spheres.html>
- <http://www.artinstructorblog.com/drawing-lesson-a-theory-of-light-and-shade>
- <http://www.artinstructorblog.com/color-studies-color-applications-and-definitions-part-1>

Next tutorial will cover the basics of shading, light source, and how to properly use Photoshop filters and tools like Burn and Dodge.